# Chronic Symptoms Following Infections

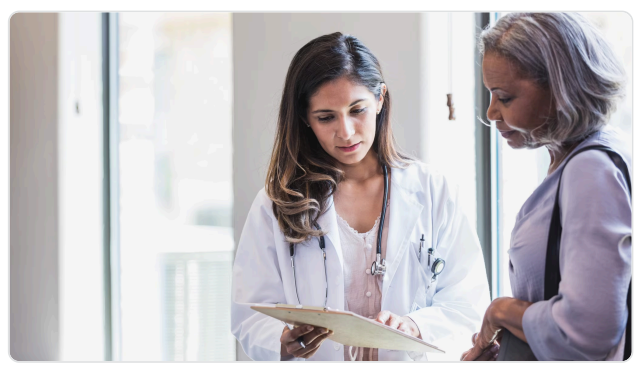
MAY 15, 2024

CDC's website is being modified to comply with President Trump's Executive Orders.

# About Chronic Symptoms Following Infections

KEY POINTS

- Infections can sometimes leave people with symptoms that last for weeks to months or longer, even after appropriate treatment.
- Symptoms can follow many different types of infections.
- It is important to discuss your symptoms and concerns with your doctor to develop a personalized treatment or care plan.



## Overview

Infections can sometimes leave people with symptoms that last for weeks to months or longer, even after appropriate treatment. Some of these symptoms are well-recognized and specific to the type of infection, for example, loss of smell and COVID-19. Other symptoms are unexplained and general (e.g., fatigue or difficulty thinking). Similar symptoms can follow many different types of infections.

### Some disease agents that have been linked to chronic symptoms

(In alphabetical order)

- *Borrelia burgdorferi* (bacteria causing Lyme disease)
- *Campylobacter*
- Chikungunya virus
- *Coxiella burnetii* (bacteria causing Q fever)
- Dengue virus
- Ebola virus
- Epstein Barr virus
- Enterovirus
- Poliovirus
- SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)
- West Nile virus

Some people with chronic symptoms following infections may not know which infection triggered the symptoms, or even recognize that they had an infection before their chronic symptoms began. People with chronic symptoms and unknown preceding infection may be diagnosed with myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome.

## How it affects your body

General symptoms can include:

- Tiredness or fatigue that interferes with daily life
- "Flu-like" symptoms including, muscle pain, headache, sweating, irritability, and general feelings of sickness

- Symptoms that get worse after physical or mental effort (also known as "post-exertional malaise")
- Difficulty thinking or concentrating (sometimes referred to as "brain fog"), trouble finding words
- Chronic or recurrent joint pain
- Sleep problems

## Causes

It is not fully known why some people experience chronic general symptoms.

**Keep Reading:**
What Causes Chronic Symptoms Following Infections

## Living with chronic symptoms

The type, duration, and intensity of chronic symptoms following an infection can be different from person to person. Symptoms may come and go or vary in severity (how bad the person feels over time). Some patients' symptoms slowly improve with time. However, it can take weeks and sometimes years to feel well. The longer fatigue or other symptoms last, the more likely they are to lead to other problems, such as physical weakness or difficulty with performing daily activities. Long-term illnesses can also impact relationships and a person's mental health.

It is important to talk to a healthcare provider if you are concerned about any symptoms that last a long time.

**Keep Reading:**
Talking with a Healthcare Provider about Chronic Symptoms

## Treatment and recovery

In many cases, there are no specific treatments or cures for chronic symptoms following an infection. There are, however, steps you can take to reduce the impact these symptoms have on your life. Given the overlap in symptoms, management and treatment approaches for people with myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS) can be helpful for people experiencing chronic symptoms.

More information on how to treat chronic symptoms following a specific infection may be available at the above disease agent links.

## What CDC is doing

Many infections can result in chronic general symptoms that look similar to ME/CFS. CDC believes that by looking across the infections known to cause chronic symptoms, we can learn more about how often and why they occur, as well as how to diagnose and treat them. This year, CDC is:

- Funding studies to learn more about how to recognize and treat patients who experience chronic symptoms after an infection
- Meeting with experts to prioritize research activities and improve guidance for clinicians
- Increasing awareness among healthcare providers and the public
- Monitoring the occurrence of chronic symptoms following certain infections
- Working with patient partner organizations to understand the needs and priorities of people with chronic symptoms following infection

## Resources

For more information on this topic:

Unexplained post-acute infection syndromes | Nature Medicine

Long COVID or Post-COVID Conditions | CDC

Information for Healthcare Providers | ME/CFS | CDC

Living with ME/CFS | Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS) | CDC

SOURCES

**CONTENT SOURCE:**

National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases (NCEZID)